

## The Impact of Teacher Knowledge Seminars: Unpacking Reflective Practice

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### Abstract

This paper reports on the learning outcomes described by experienced teachers attending a program designed to enable them to come together to engage in professional development through structured and systematic reflective practice. In the first part of the paper, we look briefly at some of the challenges of defining "reflective practice". We then describe the particular project we worked with, and present the collection and analysis of interviews with seven teachers and survey data from 35 teachers working within and near to schools in Vermont, USA. Six themes emerged from the teachers' responses:

- Renewed enthusiasm for teaching
- Looking at teaching with "fresh eyes"
- Shifts in understanding teaching
- Becoming more reflective and aware as teachers
- Enhancing the quality of student learning
- Building professional communities

These recurring themes are discussed in relation to teachers' knowledge, beliefs and learning and in relation to teachers' ways of knowing.

### Introduction

When the *Journal of Reflective Practice* was first launched, in February 2000, in just four pages of Editorial, Ghaye (2000, pp. 5-9) put to the reader nearly 50 questions about reflective practice. These included: "Would you recognize a reflective practitioner if you worked with one? What are the attributes of such people? How do we cultivate such attributes and become one? Why should we bother? What kinds of processes would we need to live through if we were trying to develop reflective teams and reflective organizations?" (p. 7). The difficulty of answering such questions was

shown by the fact that four years later, in the same scholarly journal, Johansson and Kroksmark (2004) state that: "Reflection is frequently used and plays an important role in teachers' work, but the concept of reflection is not always clear" (p. 357).

In terms of its presence or absence, according to Gelter (2003), "reflection seems not to be a spontaneous everyday activity in our professions or everyday life" (p. 337). Two reasons he gives for this are that: "it is difficult to keep our consciousness focused on one thing for longer times" and "focused reflection needs active effort and energy, and thus is not a spontaneous activity" (p. 337). Therefore, according to Gelter, "reflective capacity . . . has to be learned and encouraged" (p. 337). Griffin (2003) looked at the use of "critical incidents" in developing reflective thinking in pre-service teachers. She concludes that: "Teacher educators can guide students' development of a decision-making schema by providing opportunities for students to reflect on authentic teaching experiences with feedback" (p. 207). However, the authors of this paper believe that it is not only student teachers that can benefit from such reflection and feedback, but experienced teachers as well. This paper, then, reports on the development of the reflective capacity of a group of experienced teachers taking part in a project called the Teacher Knowledge Project (TKP), based at the School for International Training (SIT) in Vermont, USA.

### **The Teacher Knowledge Project and Inquiry Groups**

The Teacher Knowledge Project (TKP) was established by SIT in 1998 as part of a growing interest in the knowledge base of teachers (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Turner-Bisset, 1999; Freeman, 2000) "to offer teachers a disciplined way to examine their teaching in relation to student learning. In so doing, TKP supports the development, delivery, documentation, and dissemination of reflective professional development" (<http://www.sit.edu/tkp>). According to the SIT website:

In 1999, the Teacher Knowledge Project was formally organized through a grant awarded from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education (FIPSE) with the goal of extending its work in three areas. First, TKP would continue to deliver seminars in reflective professional development. Second, it would develop a research program to examine links between reflective professional development, teachers' practice, and students' learning. And finally, it would organize discussions and disseminate findings nationally to develop a network of educators, researchers, and policy makers focused on common issues in reflective professional development."

This description of the TKP highlights some of the same elements in Farrell's (2001) description of reflective teaching in which teachers learn to "subject their own beliefs of teaching and learning to a critical analysis, and thus, take more responsibility for their actions in the classroom (p. 23).

The TKP seminars are based on what it refers to as "Inquiry Groups for Teachers" designed to enable teachers to "examine their teaching in relation to their students' learning, and for making thoughtful changes in their teaching" (<http://www.sit.edu/tkp>). According to the site description, such groups help "teachers better understand and become skillful at observing students' learning, describing it, analyzing it and taking intelligent action based on their analyses." In terms of details of how such groups function, the site explains that: "Individual teachers identify an issue or question to bring before the group; with the help of their colleagues, they use the reflective cycle to describe their issue as fully as possible, generate multiple interpretations for it, and then move forward with what John Dewey called 'intelligent action' to begin the cycle again." The cycle referred to is the four-part experiential-reflective cycle, showing the relationship between experience,

description, interpretation and action, based on the work of Dewey, Kolb, Rodgers and others, as presented on the hyperlinked diagram.

In these ways, the TKP seminars similar to DeMulder and Rigsby's (2003) "Initiatives in Educational Transformation", which they describe as "an innovative professional development program for practicing k-12 teachers . . . designed to enable classroom teachers to reconceptualize their roles and transform their teaching by developing their reflective practice" (p. 267). They describe their program as being "built around a philosophy of teaching and learning that emphasizes moral professionalism, school-based inquiry, continuous improvement and collaborative work in teams" (p. 267). Although the TKP seminars do not refer to "moral professionalism", inquiry, improvement and collaboration are all key features of the program.

## **The Study**

This paper looks at the benefits that participating teachers, and indirectly, their pupils and school communities, derived from a series of TKP seminars over a five-year period, from the inception of the Teacher Knowledge Project in 1997 until 2002. It highlights the learning outcomes of 17 Inquiry Groups, made up of a total of 129 participating teachers, as they examined their teaching in terms of student learning in structured and systematic ways.

As this paper presents an overview of the impact that TKP seminars had, it does not focus on the special content area of any one seminar, for example, mentoring or technology in teaching. Instead, it creates a composite picture of the various aspects of teacher learning that were triggered and sustained by the different TKP seminars.

The methodology of this paper is based on both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. To begin with, qualitative data was gathered by conducting one-to-one, face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews with seven past seminar participants; three primary school teachers, three high school teachers, and one middle school teacher.

The aim of these interviews was to find out how the teachers themselves perceived the benefits of the TKP seminars by asking them to reflect on their experiences one or more years *after* having participated in a seminar. We decided to ask participants themselves about the impact of the seminars as we believe that if teachers perceive a change in their own development, then the change is real (Churchill, Williamson & Grady, 1997; Curtis & Cheng, 2001).

## **Participant Interviews and Survey Data**

The interviews and surveys were conducted and completed in 2002, using a contact database of teachers who attended the TKP seminars since the project started in 1998 (see above). The length of time since the participants attended the seminars varied, with most of the interviews conducted with and surveys completed by participants who attended seminars between 12 and 24 months earlier. Three quarters of the participants were females, and all participants were state schoolteachers of a wide range of subjects working both at primary and secondary schools, and most, but not all, were living and working within the US state of Vermont at the time of the study. All of the teachers had extensive classroom teaching experience, with 8 to 12 years' on average, though some had up to 20 years.

The interviews were semi-structured, interviewee-led, open-ended and informal, were conducted by one of the authors, who was at that time a Fulbright scholar carrying out research at SIT for 12

months. The interviews lasted, on average, one hour, allowing an in-depth exploration of interviewee responses. She started by getting teachers to talk about themselves first, for example, where and what they taught, how long they had been teaching, what their students were like etc. Then they moved on to the TKP seminars. The interviewer asked each teacher for some background info, such as, which TKP seminars they had taken, when and where, etc. The third part of the interview was based on open-ended follow-up prompts and probes, for example, "Tell me about what the seminars have meant to you," and "In what way did the seminars contribute to your professional development?" and "How do you see the benefits of the seminars now, looking back on the time since you attended the seminars?" The interviews were tape-recorded and selectively transcribed, focusing on the sections that seemed relevant and interesting from the point of view of different learning outcomes for the teacher and their students.

After the interviews had been completed, a survey questionnaire was sent out to 87 past TKP seminar participants, together with letters of explanation (see Appendix A). The aim of the survey was to get a wider spread of teacher views on the seminar outcomes. The questionnaire comprised sixteen statements related to the six different categories. One of the ways in which this questionnaire was different from others, was the fact that each of the statements was an actual quotation taken from the interviews with teachers and from earlier project documentation. In this way, rather than employing researcher-created or researcher-imposed categories, the statements represented learning outcomes that some of the teachers themselves had already identified. What we wanted, then, was to get a more accurate picture of the extent to which these outcomes were seen as relevant by all participating teachers.

We received 35 completed questionnaires out of the 87. This is a 40% return rate, higher than usual for such surveys (Cohen & Manion, 1985). We believe that this in itself is significant. It is possible that this many teachers took the time to read through, complete and return the questionnaire because the seminar that they attended played an important role in their professional development.

## **Analyzing the Data**

We believe that in the field of education it is not only tangible and measurable change that matters (Levin & Riffel, 1998). Ultimately, the aim of the TKP project is to improve the quality of learning in our schools. However, as we know, it is not only what a teacher *does* in the classroom that affects the quality of student learning. Research has also shown that the qualities that a teacher brings into the classroom, for example, enthusiasm, energy, self-awareness, and open-mindedness, have a tremendous influence on students and their learning. Therefore, instead of only looking for evidence of changed teaching practice, we wanted to remain open to a wide range of professional and developmental changes that may have occurred when considering the impact that the seminars had. We also felt that asking teachers some time *after* the experience would provide us with a clearer picture of the extended and on-going impact of the TKP seminars, from a longitudinal perspective, which appears to be relatively rarely reported in the literature.

When analyzing the data we followed a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Nunan, 1992). Accordingly, we did not have a preconceived list of outcomes that we were expecting to find. Instead, we wanted the impact of the seminars to emerge from the data. Putting this approach into practice was made possible by the fact that the researcher conducting the interviews and carrying out the initial data analysis was an outsider to the project. As a starting point, she was aware of the fact that the seminars were committed to helping teachers become more reflective in a way that enhances student learning. During the interviews she asked open-ended questions, and this allowed teachers to give their personal views on what involvement in the seminar had meant to

them.

The following six categories of seminar outcomes emerged from the initial data analysis:

1. Renewed enthusiasm for teaching
2. Looking at teaching with "fresh eyes"
3. Shifts in understanding teaching
4. Becoming more reflective and aware as teachers
5. Enhancing the quality of student learning
6. Building professional communities

As a next step, these six categories of seminar benefits were compared to participant feedback found in earlier project documentation, such as notes from early, informal discussions with participant teachers, TKP seminar observation sheets and other field notes. No additional categories were identified; the six categories appeared to cover all the learning benefits that the participating teachers had described in written course feedback and during earlier interviews conducted for the purposes of project evaluation. However, some of these earlier teacher comments shed light on aspects of teacher learning which, although fitting within one of the six categories, were not so clearly highlighted during the follow-up interviews. In other words, with the help of this additional source of documentary data, a richer and more complete picture of seminar outcomes emerged.

## Findings

Although there is clearly overlap among the different categories of seminar outcomes, we decided to look at each category individually, as there is also much that distinguishes each category. In recognizing the distinguishing features of each category, we aimed to "unpack" the meaning of reflective practice, as interpreted by these teachers, based on their TKP seminar experiences. As Newman (1999) has stated before, "We should reject the certainty of any one meaning implied by the single term reflective practice" (cited in Ghaye, 2000, pp. 5-6). In the discussion that follows, each category will be introduced by three quotations that highlight different aspects of teacher learning within each category, and that show some of the relationships between categories. The qualitative analysis of the quotations will be followed by some comments based on the analysis of the survey. It is important to note here that we agree with Gitlin's statement (1990, p. 444) that "educational research is still a process that, for the most part, silences those studied, ignores their personal knowledge, and strengthens the assumption that researchers are *the* producers of knowledge" (cited in Bailey and Nunan, 1996, p. 12). Although this position has been challenged since Gitlin's statement was made (see, for example, Freeman, 1996), we believe that we still have some way to go in giving a voice to the teachers. We have, therefore, attempted to keep our commentary on their responses clear and concise.

### 1. Renewed enthusiasm for teaching

Many of the teachers interviewed noted a change in the personal qualities that they were able to bring into their teaching. Some commented on feeling more enthusiastic about their job, while others mentioned slowing down and feeling more confident as a teacher.

#### **Feeling rejuvenated**

"For me the seminar was a turning point. It was truly rejuvenating in the sense of bringing back the best of the youthful teacher. It was like being a new teacher without the anxieties of youth." (T6)

**Sense of humor**

"I think my sense of humor got better. I think the slowing down allowed me to tell more stories. Be less product oriented, stop worrying about whether we are going to get it down and spend more time enhancing the experience." (T4)

**Calm and readiness for change**

"I don't know what it was, but something really made an impact. [The seminar] provided a means for me to bring together things that happened over the past 21 years. Something really made an impact, because my teaching now feels very different to me. There is a level of calm to it that I'd never had before and I think it comes from understanding that it really is a constant cycle of experience, reflection, decision making. And there is never going to be a time when I can say OK, I got it. Because times change, the kids change, I change, it's like waves." (T2)

The teacher speaking in the first quotation has been in the profession for over 25 years. For experienced veteran teachers like her, the sense of "rejuvenation" that she describes can be a vital source of energy needed to inspire learners and to combat teacher burn-out, which has long been recognized as a serious threat (Maslach, 1982). The link between teacher development and pupil learning is clearly made in Quotation 2, where slowing down and being more relaxed has enabled this teacher to be more attentive to students and to feel free to engage in more narrative interaction. It is interesting to note here, the relationship between story-telling and reflective practice made by, for example, Mattingly, 1991. Finally, the last quotation highlights the effects of reflecting after and over long periods of time, as with the first quotation, and the ways in which this can help us as teachers feel very differently about some things we may have been doing in our classrooms for a long time.

The survey responses showed that the renewed sense of enthusiasm described above was shared by the majority of the teachers who attended a TKP seminar, as 31 out of 35 (89%) teachers indicated that they felt more enthusiastic about teaching, while 32 respondents (91%) felt that they had become more confident professionals, after the seminars. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents, 25 out of 35 (71%), noted that they had become more light-hearted and able to bring their sense of humor into the classroom.

## 2. Looking at teaching with "fresh eyes"

Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993, p. 26) write that "experience is a negative force trapping us into pre-determined responses". As valuable as experience is, routine that builds up over the years can make it difficult for teachers to perceive classroom events with fresh eyes, and to become open to alternative interpretations. In terms of *reviewing* seen as *re-viewing*, (Curtis, 1991), habits formed over time may lead to an inability to see our classrooms as clearly as we once used to. However, as the quotations below illustrate, the TKP seminars enabled the teachers to develop multiple-perspectives on what was happening and not happening in these teachers' classroom in a number of ways.

**Stepping back**

"In the moment, I didn't have the time to reflect; I was just responding."

But standing back, that's what the Seminar has allowed me to do, to see more by reflecting on it, when I have the time to look at that moment. So that's been for me the main value of face-to-face meetings." (T5)

**Breaking out of subjectivity**

"The other thing that's been really helpful in the seminar is to look at video clips with other teachers because other people saw things that I hadn't seen because they have their own perspectives. I think it's really important for me to get that feedback from other professionals and not just get lost in my own subjectivity." (Project documentation)

**Trigger for further development**

"When I saw my tapes last year, I was shocked at how distant I seemed to be. And I think of myself as being really involved with my students. So to see myself just emotionally not present was very weird [ . . . ] It was really, really helpful for me to have this evidence to compare to last year. And I have some material now to think about in terms of - now that I feel stronger about the rapport I have - what else do I want to look at?" (T2)

As the first quotation shows, the seminars provided an opportunity for the teachers to "stand back" from the immediacy of teaching and for them to revisit classroom events from a distance. Reflecting on one's own practice from such a reflective distance can help teachers to see more of what is actually happening in their classrooms, to appreciate aspects of their own teaching and learning that they might not otherwise be aware of. The second quotation highlights a number of important points, including the importance of collaborative professional development, through peer feedback, and the possibility of some sense of "objectivity" through the distancing created by others' perspectives of us and what we do. The third quotation illustrates another kind of "positive distancing", in this case, the gap between what we think is happening and what we think we are doing in class versus how these appear to us when viewed from a comparative perspective.

When analyzing data from the survey we found that 32 out of 35 (91%) teachers indicated that the statement "I tend to look at my teaching with 'fresh eyes'" was true for them (20 somewhat true, 12 true).

### 3. Shifts in understanding teaching

As all the TKP seminars have a strong inquiry orientation, it is not surprising that several teachers noted an improvement in their ability to name and describe aspects of their practice. Naming and describing often triggers a process of awareness raising and concept clarification, which in turn may lead to a more in depth understanding of the teaching-learning process.

**Making the implicit explicit**

"A lot of it is just putting titles to it. I might have done some of it before but it was nice having a structure, finding the right words for what we are doing." (T4)

**Naming and understanding**

"Being able to articulate what I am doing, rather than being a more naïve practitioner, has helped me to understand better what it is that I am

doing and also to recognize it while it's happening." (T5)

### **Clarifying concepts**

"I think feedback is a term I used in a much more casual way, but they [seminar facilitators] were using it to mean something specific. What they meant by feedback had a lot to do with observing in a way that I learn about teaching. It was paying attention very closely to what it was that the students were doing, not just what I was doing. So that the feedback could *feed back* and inform my teaching." (T1)

As the first quotation shows, for some teachers naming and describing involves making their implicit, experiential knowledge explicit, and in so doing, give it form and structure. This may be thought of as a process of "framing through naming". Quotation 2 highlights the link between the process of articulating practice and arriving at a better understanding of this same practice, with the teacher making the distinction between experience and lack thereof being based on ability to articulate the experience. It also implicitly refers to Schon's (1983) distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In some cases, participating in the seminar has brought about a re-definition of certain terms and concepts, as the teachers now understand them. For example, the third quotation shows how the concept of 'feedback' has changed and taken on a deeper meaning for this teacher after the TKP seminars, and that this change in understanding has been accompanied by a shift in focus, in this teacher's case, from themselves to their students.

Of the 35 teachers who responded to the survey, 33 (94%) felt that it was easier for them to talk about their practice and articulate their teaching principles. The same number also indicated that they think more about *why* they do what they do. In addition, 32 of the teachers (91%) also indicated that they believed that had become better at examining their own practice in terms of student learning.

## **4. Becoming more reflective and aware as teachers**

The ability to look at classrooms with 'fresh eyes' and a deeper understanding of the learning processes have enabled teachers to become more reflective and aware when planning their lessons and when making decisions in the classroom. The quotations that follow demonstrate what this looks like in practice.

### **Providing a framework for reflection**

"The reflective cycle gave me a more methodical way to do what I was doing already. I AM a reflective person, but this kind of gave me a structure that would lead me somewhere instead of just circling around and around and around. It provides a framework that I can use to think about a specific student, or a specific incident. I can look at my students' learning and there are questions I can ask to get them to reflect so that I know more about how I could help them." (T2)

### **Being more self-aware in the classroom**

"I see reflective teaching as a way of being more self aware in the classroom, to think about what you're doing, draw conclusions from what's happening in the class and make adjustments. It's like doing a kind of research. For example, if certain kids aren't paying attention, instead of



saying, "these kids don't know how to pay attention", I ask broad questions. I look at the dynamics in the class and pay special attention to what I can learn about students' backgrounds." (Project documentation)

### **Need for non-judgmental attitudes**

"There was something during the first seminar that had an impact on me. It was a question put to us about how we make ourselves receptive to feedback and the role of judgement in that. For example, during a discussion when I am paraphrasing what somebody said, I might be bringing in my own judgement and this might limit my ability to receive feedback. If I am coming in expecting to see a certain thing, then I might not notice some things. That expectations in a way might be creating judgements and all of this might be making me less receptive to what the kids are really saying." (T1)

All three teachers' voices in this section highlight the links between having a reflective and aware attitude in general and dealing with specific teaching situations. Having a "framework [ . . . ] to think about a specific incident" (Quotation 1), asking "broad questions" which take into account class dynamic and student background (Quotation 2), and remaining open and receptive to students by being aware of one's own judgements and expectations (Quotation 3) all describe ways of dealing with challenging situations in a teacher's daily practice. In addition, in the first quotation, the benefits of structure and framework are identified, in the second, the notion of classroom teacher as classroom researcher (Curtis, 1999) emerges, and in the third, the complex relationship between expecting, noticing, judging and receiving is being reflected on by the teacher.

Data from the survey also seems to support the idea that becoming more reflective has enabled these teachers to cope with difficult classroom situations in thoughtful and sensitive ways. Of the 35 teachers, 30 (86%) felt that there was a change in their attitude towards dealing with classroom problem, indicating that the statement, "I spend more time clarifying what the problem is instead of jumping to a solution" was true for them (19 somewhat true, 11 true).

## **5. Enhancing the quality of student learning**

According to Bailey, Nunan and Curtis (2001), one of the key criteria for judging whether teacher professional development has been effective is whether or not it results in "more and better learning" (p. 6) in the classroom. This may be a somewhat controversial view, but in a very real sense, all of the seminar outcomes identified so far contribute to enhancing the quality of student learning, as teachers described ways in which their involvement in a TKP seminar have had a positive impact on their learners.

### **Ways of getting student feedback**

"We talked in our [seminar] about how we can't be observing everybody. [ . . . ] One thing I started with [my students] is, I required them to do one-on-one time with me for 20 minutes. I learned so much from those one-on-one sessions. I asked them, 'What are your goals? How do you learn best? What makes it easy for you to learn?' And then just asking them directly, 'Can you give me some feedback about how class is going for you? What do you like? What would you like me to change? If you were

teaching this class, what would you do?' So that was really helpful."  
(Project documentation)

### **Learning through discovery**

"I let the kids discover stuff and whenever there's an opportunity to not answer the question, I just throw it back on them to solve it . . . I think this is one of the ways in which the Inquiry Project changed my teaching . . . Well, there was that example in class today, when someone says, 'Is this the right answer?' And then instead of saying 'yes' or 'no', saying, 'Well, how did you get that answer?' . . . And then have them explain to you the process they went through rather than just say, 'You got the right answer. OK, done with that page.'" (Project documentation)

### **Helping students become more reflective**

"Through the seminars I've learnt more about the kinds of questions that will help students to reflect on their learning and to be able to articulate insights about it that they might not realize otherwise. [ . . . ] In years past, I just haven't been very successful at coming up with the kinds of questions that made it happen. The model questions from the seminar are very useful because I can see through the questions students being thrown back on thinking about, 'Well, what did happen there, how do I know that I learned what I think I learned?'" (T2)

Quotation 1 describes a specific classroom practice that this teacher started with her learners as a result of participating in the seminar. Earlier on in this paper, we referred to the fact that change does not necessarily need to refer to a change in practice, but this is a good example of where a positive change in practice, i.e., an innovation, has occurred as a result of changed understanding. Quotation 2 shows that student feedback can have a dual purpose; in addition to providing valuable information for the teacher, it gives learners, as well as teachers, an opportunity to become more reflective, whilst also showing a shift of attention from product to process. The third quotation in this section also shows the ways in which teachers engaging in collaborative professional development, through reflection on practice, has enabled teachers to enable their learners to develop in similar ways. This third quotation also highlights the importance of "articulated insights", which may be similar to Johansson and Kroksmark's (2004) notion of "teachers' own experience captured in the concept of teachers' intuition-in-action" (p. 357).

In terms of the survey, 30 of the 35 teachers (86%) felt that they now had a deeper appreciation of the way their students learn, while 28 (80%) indicated that they were more aware of the value of student feedback and asked for it on a regular basis. In addition, 27 (77%) indicated that becoming more reflective teachers has enabled them to help their students become more reflective.

## **6. Building professional communities**

In addition to the gains that teachers experienced at an individual level, the seminars also helped to make connections and build a sense of community across different schools in the region.

### **Communities of trust and openness**

"You go to faculty meetings and everybody tells their problems, looking for solutions. But everyone is usually tired by then, so nobody wants to think creatively, or brainstorm at faculty meetings. These meetings are cut and dried; you go there with a general purpose and you leave. [ . . . ] During the seminars it was good to feel free and talk. And if you really get to know others and feel free, it helps in talking about things that really matter to us personally." (T4)

### **Developing a common language**

"It was most helpful to be able to discuss feedback in class and name it. It gives you a way to talk about what is happening with other people. I now can give it a name and sort of identify it so I can have a conversation with somebody about it. When I come to a seminar or a situation where I'm talking to other teachers, this process gives us a way to talk about teaching. So the naming is more a way that we as adults have of talking." (T7)

### **Getting in touch with the wider professional community**

"It was great to get out and meet a group of people who weren't from my school and who had different experiences, connecting with people from the district for the most part. [ . . . ] I think what the Project is doing is wonderful and I hope that they continue to offer seminars to teachers. I think that there aren't enough avenues for teachers to sit together and talk in a safe environment." (T3)

As the first quotation shows, the trust and openness that developed in the group was a pre-condition for meaningful interaction, as well as being one of the valuable outcomes of the seminar. In addition, the importance of "freedom of expression" and the personal-professional connection were highlighted in this response. Quotation 2 in this section draws attention to another dimension of building professional communities -developing a common language which enables teachers to share their expertise and learn from one another, which relates to the "framing through naming" mentioned earlier, but in this case, communally as well as individually. The third quotation here, related to Miller's (2004) notion of "reflective space", touches on an important but perhaps commonly overlooked aspect of professional development of teachers, i.e., the importance of the place and the space in which we expose ourselves professionally being *safe*.

Most of the teachers in the survey, 33 (94%), noted that they felt more connected with a wider professional community. We think that this is a clear indication that the seminars were successful in terms of putting professionals in touch and strengthening the sense of community among schools in this area.

## **Conclusion**

One of the limitations of this study is its population sample size, i.e., 35 surveys completed and seven interviews carried out. However, quantity and quality of insights into reflective practice is not necessarily a function of the number of participants in a study. For example, the recently published study by Glazer, Abbott and Harris (2004), based on data gathered in 2000, was based on data gathered from "a group of five elementary school teachers met to investigate the nature of professional reflection and develop a process of collaborative reflection as productive professional

development" (p. 33). In spite of the small group size, Glazer, Abbott and Harris conclude that "these teachers' beliefs that reflection is both necessary and valuable, coupled with their recommendation that it be collaborative, served as the basis of the process for collaborative reflection developed by the group" (p. 33).

In terms of the effectiveness of the TKP seminars, a factor that was key to their success needs to be highlighted at this point. The seminars themselves provided the opportunity, the conditions and the frameworks for reflective professional development, and the fact that each seminar was facilitated by an experienced school teacher and an expert trainer from SIT meant that a framework was set up which took 'real' teaching concerns into account while creating opportunities for teachers to explore and challenge their principles and practices in a safe and supportive environment. However, the very fact that teachers with so many years of classroom experience would make the time to come to such developmental seminars means that they were highly committed to growth, development and change when they arrived. In this sense, the TKP seminars may have merely provided a safe space/place for them to speak and listen to each other, and engage in collaborative professional development through reflecting on their practices, assisted by focus and facilitation with experienced teacher educators. However, this space is important, as Anzul and Ely (1999, p. 27) point out: "The reflective practitioner makes a space. And while that space gives no guarantees, it allows us to think again, to do again, and slowly, to breach the stagnant moat between what most of us do and what most of us know we do" (cited in Ghaye, 2000, p. 7).

We return to our original notion of unpacking reflective practice and Newman's (1999) warning that "We should reject the certainty of any one meaning implied by the single term reflective practice" (cited in Ghaye, 2000, pp. 5-6). In terms of what this means for those of us who are in the classroom all day, everyday, it seems clear that the teachers who were interviewed and those who completed and returned the questionnaire have a clear understanding of what the term *reflective practice* means for them and for their students.

In the Introduction to this paper, we referred to Griffin's work (2003) with "critical incidents" in developing reflective thinking in pre-service teachers. She concluded that "results of the self-assessment of growth in critical reflection revealed the emergence of an orientation akin to Dewey's (1933) three attributes of reflective individuals, open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness". (p. 207), which we would claim are also evident in the voices of the teachers reported in this paper.

The six categories that emerged helped us to unravel the meaning and show that in addition to a great deal of overlap in the characteristics of reflective practice there are also distinguishing features which may help us to more clearly articulate what we mean when we talk of teachers as reflective practitioners.

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## Appendix A

Dear NAME

As the Teacher Knowledge Project is moving on to a new phase we have to write a final report on our achievements so far, as well as plan activities for the future. Therefore, it would be extremely helpful to us if you would fill in the attached brief questionnaire on what impact the seminar(s) you attended might have had on you and your teaching.

We realize that it might have been some time since you attended the TKP seminars, but

we are also aware that educational change is gradual and subtle, so participating in a seminar may have blended with all the other changes and developments in your personal and professional life. But even if we cannot measure precisely the effect of the seminars, we would like to have an indication of the type of benefits they might have brought into the professional lives of participating teachers.

**To get a clear picture of the Project's impact, we need as many questionnaires as possible completed and returned, so your response is very important to us. Please take the time to check off your responses and send the questionnaire back by 1 March.**

We hope that you might find the questionnaire itself interesting. The statements are based on interviews carried out with eight former seminar participants and therefore represent ways in which those teachers believe they have benefited from involvement in the Teacher Knowledge Project. So as you reflect on where you stand in relation to each statement you can also get a picture of what other teachers consider to be the outcomes of the reflective professional development seminars.

Finally, please feel free to include additional comments on areas that may not be covered by the statements.

We appreciate your collaboration and your contributions!

*Name of Researcher*  
Fulbright Exchange Programme  
Teacher Knowledge Project  
School for International Training

*Researcher's Email Address*

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### **Study of Impact of TKP Seminars on Participants**

The statements express benefits that participating in a TKP seminar might have had for you. For each statement please indicate the appropriate response for yourself. Please send the questionnaire back in the self-addressed envelopes by 1 March.

- 1 I feel more enthusiastic about my teaching.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 2 I feel more confident about myself as a teacher.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 3 I have slowed down and become more thoughtful.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 4 I tend to look at my teaching with 'fresh eyes'.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me



- 5 There is a change in my attitude to dealing with classroom problems. I spend more time clarifying what the problem is instead of jumping to a solution.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 6 I have become more aware of the way my learners see me and the effect I have on them.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 7 I have become more light-hearted and able to bring my sense of humor into the classroom.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 8 I have become more observant and better able to 'read' student behavior.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 9 I value observation more and so I tend to give learners more tasks which involve observation.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 10 I have become more non-judgmental in my attitude towards student learning.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 11 I have a deeper appreciation of the way students learn.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 12 I have a better understanding of feedback.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 13 I have a better understanding and appreciation of the complexity of teaching and learning.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 14 I think more about *why* I do what I do.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 15 It is easier for me to talk about my practice and articulate my teaching principles.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me
- 16 I feel more connected with a wider professional community.  
☐ True for me                      ☐ Somewhat true for me                      ☐ Not true for me

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